

Leiter II Building
(now, Sears, Roebuck and Company)
Northeast corner of South State
Street and Congress Street
Chicago
Cook County
Illinois

HABS No. ILL-1022

HABS
ILL,
16-CHIG,
24-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington Planning and Service Center
1730 North Lynn Street
Arlington, Virginia

LEITER II BUILDING
(now, Sears, Roebuck and Company)HABS
ILL,
16-CHIG,
24-

Location: Northeast corner of South State Street and East Congress Street, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois.

Present Owner: Sears, Roebuck and Company, Chicago.

Present Occupant: Owner.

Present Use: Department store.

Statement of Significance: When the second Leiter Building was built, it was one of the largest commercial structures in the world. Jenney, the architect, had solved the technical problems of skeleton construction in the first Leiter Building and the Home Insurance Building; he revealed in the second Leiter Building an understanding of its formal expression - his design is clear, confident and distinctive.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners (chain of title): The following abstract of the chain of title is based on property records in Cook County Recorder's Office.

The building was originally owned by Levi Z. Leiter who acquired the property on which it stands February 5, 1881 (Document 309202). The building continued in Leiter's estate, the present owners acquiring it October 5, 1931 (Document 10982767). The building has been leased to: J. Dellafield Company, August 6, 1923 (Document 8053357); L. J. Siegel Company (Siegel, Cooper and Company), January 10, 1927 (Document 9516790); Famous State Store, Inc., June 26, 1930 (Document 10691808); and Mercantile Discount Company, July 28, 1930 (Document 187307).

2. Date of erection: 1889-91.
3. Architect: William Le Baron Jenney (1832-1907).
4. Alterations and additions: "In 1940, caissons to hardpan were built under the west wall, just prior to the construction of the State Street subway." /Frank A. Randall, History of the Development of Building Construction in Chicago (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1949),

p. 124⁷. The south bay at the ground floor has been opened in an arcade to accommodate the sidewalk in the widening of Congress Street. The interiors have been remodeled for later uses.

B. Bibliography:

Condit, Carl W. The Rise of the Skyscraper. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952. pp. 135-36, passim.

Randall, Frank A. History of the Development of Building Construction in Chicago. Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1949. pp. 124, 159, 169, 174.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: In the second Leiter Building, with its large, simply balanced facades, Jenney achieved a clear distinctive formal expression of skeleton construction.
2. Condition of fabric: Ground floor exterior and interior heavily remodeled.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Rectangular, 401'-11" (nine-bay west front) x 143'-9" (three-bay south and north ends) x 133'-13 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (eight stories, sidewalk to cornice).
2. Wall construction: Light gray white Maine granite walls. Bays divided by simple classical piers, subdivided with slender Richardsonian Romanesque colonettes. Facades divided into large, rectangular patterns, open and simple, reflecting the skeleton frame.
3. Structural system, framing: Iron frame, bay spacing 21'-6-5/8" x 20'-2". Iron beams and girders, vaulted tile floors.
4. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Later.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Large, one-over-one-light double-hung sash windows.

5. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Flat.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Very simple, very shallow cornice, heightened corona, dentil bed course.

C. Description of Interior:

Floor plans: Planned with undivided, open interiors, stairways and elevator along east wall and at center (now altered). Interiors extensively remodeled.

The following is a description of the interior:

"The building is of straight warehouse construction. The interior at any point reveals a great sweep of open space divided into broad avenues marked off by the ranks of high, slender columns. The extraordinarily wide bays and the unusual story height of 16 feet combine with the slender wrought-iron columns to make this dramatic impression of open and airy spaciousness. No other department store can quite match the Sears Roebuck in this respect." /Carl W. Condit, The Rise of the Skyscraper (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 135./

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